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ABSTRACT

This report describes the administrative organizational plans and pedagogical objectives for early childhood education programs in Sweden which have evolved since the passage of the 1973 Pre-School Activities Act. A Central Joint Committee for Pre-schools will be set up to advise both the Board of Health and Welfare and the Board of Education. Within the individual municipalities, pre-school activities are to be the responsibility of the central social services committee, although, according to the government bill, the various forms of pre-school activity will be guided by a uniform educational approach. The approach is based on interplay and cooperation between children and adults, children and children, and adults and adults. A description of the organizational model, as set by the 1968 Commission on Child Centres, includes discussions of full- and part-time pre-schools, the staff team, the latest available statistics on enrollment, projected expansion figures, and commissions appointed to review the conditions of pre-school children. (CS)

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THE PRE-SCHOOL - FIRST STEP TOWARDS A BETTER ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN

by Bodil Rosengren

12 December 1973 was an important day for Swedish children under school age. On that date, the Swedish Parliament, after a long debate, but with very few "nays", passed the new Pre-school Activities Act. At last, small children have a statutory right to adequate provisions for their care.

What are "pre-school activities"?

Article 2 of the Act defines pre-school activities as activities pursued in the form of a pre-school, a family day nursery, or other complementary pre-school activities.

PRE-SCHOOL is the blanket term used for the activities organized in the form of DAY NURSERIES, at which children between the ages of 6 months and 7 years spend five or more hours a day, and PART-TIME GROUPS, which receive children between the ages of 3 and 7 for a shorter period, usually three hours a day. (A "part-time group" is the new name for a play school.) The part-time group can either be incorporated in the activities of the day nursery, or organized independently. By "complementary pre-school activities" are meant, apart from family day nurseries, the care of temporarily sick children at home by municipally employed childminders; organized park games; and the provisions the municipal authorities are required to make for children who are covered in principle by the pre-school system, but are unable for some reason to attend a pre-school. Such provisions include the toy lending service (i.e. play training for handicapped children, mainly the mentally retarded) and play therapy for sick children at home, provided by visiting pre-school staff, and for children in hospital, where it is provided by permanently employed pre-school teachers known as "play therapists".

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The pre-school

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The main import of Parliament's decision

1. A general, public pre-school for six-year-olds

A 1-year public pre-school for all six-year-olds is to be introduced as from 1 July 1975. The municipal authorities will be required by law to provide places in pre-schools, day nurseries or part-time groups for all children in the area, from and including the autumn term of the year in which the child reaches the age of 6. The municipality is also required, in good time before the child commences pre-school, to inform the parents regarding the purpose, content, and working methods of the pre-school system. By such information, in combination with case-finding activities, the municipal authority should endeavour to ensure that all six-year-olds in the area participate.

The general pre-school will cover, in principle, three hours per day, i.e. at least 15 hours per week, or a total of 525 hours, and it will be free of charge. In sparsely populated areas, where the children cannot participate on this scale owing to long distances, or for other reasons, the authority can split the pre-school over two years. It must then cover a total of at least 700 hours. The children affected are to be assigned a place at a pre-school from and including the autumn term of the year in which they reach the age of 5. In this case, too, the municipal authorities are required to ensure, by information and case-finding activities, that as many children as possible utilize the places assigned.

2. Children in special need of support and stimulation

Children who for physical, mental, social, linguistic or other reasons are in need of special support in their development are to be given an opportunity to participate in the activities of the pre-school from as early an age as possible. These children should also be integrated to the greatest possible extent with the other children attending the day nursery or part-time group. No general age limit can be given for when places should be found for such children. It is the responsibility of the municipal authority to decide in each individual case, in consultation with the parents, when the child should start pre-school. The age of 4, however, is given as a guideline.

The authority should operate a case-finding system, in order to learn what children require pre-school places for special reasons. It is important that the child health and social care systems should co-operate on this.

The responsibility for ensuring that children in special need of support and stimulation obtain the pre-school places to which they are entitled should rest primarily with the municipality where the child is registered for census purposes, or is permanently domiciled. This responsibility remains until such time as it is assumed by another authority, for example the county council, which operates, among other things, institutions for mentally retarded children, and which is also responsible for medical care. Such children should be integrated as far as possible in the municipal pre-schools, and the county council should reimburse the cost to the municipalities. When children, by reason of their handicap, must stay at special institutions, the county council is entirely responsible for their care.

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Those needing early attention include the children of immigrants. For immigrant children, the pre-school can constitute a suitable initial introduction to Swedish society. It is urgent that the municipal authorities should take steps to establish contact with those immigrant children in need of special support and stimulation in their development, and, as far as possible, provide pre-school places for them before the age of 6.

Those children in sparsely populated areas who lack peer contacts will also be given an opportunity to start pre-school before the age of 6.

Like the general public pre-school, the facilities provided for children under the age of 6 who are in special need of support and stimulation will be free of charge, and cover up to 15 hours per week, or 525 hours per year.

3. Expansion of the pre-school system

In order to create the conditions necessary for a continued rapid expansion of day nursery activities for the children of gainfully employed parents, or students, each municipal council is required to adopt a plan for pre-school activities. Such plans should cover a period of at least five years, and be operated on a "rolling" system, with revision once a year. The plan should set out the need for pre-schools (day nurseries or part-time groups), family day nurseries, and other complementary pre-school activities within the area. It should also indicate to what extent and in what manner this need is to be met.

The work of planning should be co-ordinated as far as possible with other municipal planning. It is of the greatest importance that the municipal authorities should reserve land for future pre-school requirements. In good time before the council makes its decision, organisations and individuals should be furnished with lucid information on the pre-school plan so that they can offer their comments.

The decision that each municipality should have its own pre-school plan is based on the consideration that the introduction of a general pre-school for six-year-olds should not detract from the expansion of pre-school activities for other age-groups with gainfully employed or student parents. It has not, however, been considered possible to make it a statutory obligation that the municipalities should meet the entire need for such provisions in the form of day nurseries.

4. State grants

As from 1 January 1975, state operating grants will be paid to the municipal authorities for pre-schools in the form of part-time groups. (Grants of this kind were made previously, until 1966.) These will amount to SKr. 1,200* per child per year for the increased number of six-year-olds for whom places in such groups are found, as compared with the number of places in May 1973. Those authorities which already have places for all six-year-olds will receive the same grant in respect of the number of places exceeding

* 1 SKr (Swedish Krona) = US$ 0.23 or £ 0.09 (approximately)

90 % of the total number of six-year-olds in the area. The same grant will be made in respect of four- and five-year-olds who are given places in part-time groups by reason of a special need of support and stimulation, although to a maximum of 10 % of the total number of four- and five-year-olds in the area. An initial construction grant will be paid by the state until 1 October 1975 for premises for part-time groups, to a scale of SKr. 3,000 per place. As previously, both a state initial grant and a state operating grant are made in respect of day nurseries. The initial grant has been temporarily raised to SKr. 12,000 per place. As from 1 July 1974, the operating grant is SKr. 6,500 per place per year.

5. Central and local administration

As previously, the central inspecting authority for the pre-school is the National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen), which performs pedagogic and social development work, and handles the planning of expansion, and premises.

Within the municipality, pre-school activities are the responsibility of the central social services committee, or the child welfare committee. The council, however, can decide that another municipal body should handle such activities in place of the child welfare committee, such as a separate pre-school committee or, in some cases, the education committee.

6. The creation of a central unit for collaboration, the Joint Committee for Pre-schools

Both the Board of Health and Welfare and the National Board of Education (Skoloverstyrelsen) will have important functions to discharge in the pre-school sector. The Board of Education, for instance, will be responsible for the training of pre-school staff. The necessary pedagogic research and development work must also be co-ordinated, and promoted. A central Joint Committee for Pre-schools will therefore be set up, to advise both the Board of Health and Welfare, and the Board of Education. The Committee will prepare questions relating to the pre-school, and its future structure. Even if the Committee only has an advisory status, and the relevant decisions are reserved for the authority concerned, it can itself initiate questions relating to the pre-school and suggest measures to the responsible authorities. The Committee is made up of representatives of the Swedish society at large, with members from the Board of Health and Welfare, the Board of Education, the Federation of Municipal Councils (Kommunförbundet), the Federation of County Councils (Landstingsförbundet), the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions (LO), the Swedish Association of Vocational Teachers (Svenska fackläraförbundet), and Parliament. The Committee has a special secretary, but relies otherwise on officials from the relevant authority, according to the matter in hand.

The pre-school

All pre-school activities based on a uniform educational approach

The Swedish Parliament's decision is interesting both politically, and from the standpoint of the history of ideas. It marked an end to the debate waged since the mid 30's, a debate characterised by a dual view of the value of provisions for the care of young children, i.e. the old discussion of day nursery versus play school, of the lesser educational content of the day nursery programme, and the play school as the only pedagogically defensible form of institutional activity for infants. The Government Bill on which Parliament based its decision states quite clearly that pedagogic activities shall be of the same quality in the day nursery as in the part-time group. The various forms of pre-school activity should be characterised by a uniform educational approach.

In my own opinion, the day nursery should, in this context, be in a much better position than the part-time group to realize a pedagogic programme of the type that was put forward by the 1968 Commission on Child Centres, and on which Parliament based its decision. This is partly because the children spend a longer time at the day nursery, which permits more broadly conceived pedagogic planning than with the three-hour activity of the part-time group. Also, more adults function in the day nursery's team, sharing the pedagogic work according to aptitude and interest, while the three-hour group has one adult staff member, possibly with an assistant, for a group of 20 children, and a limited amount of time available to work with the group. This means that the children, among other things, have too few adults to imitate, and identify with.

Studies done by Danish researchers have shown, for instance, that five hours' educational activities among pre-school children better meet the requirements that should be set as regards the capacity of the pre-school to provide for the children's social and emotional development, and offer increased opportunities for carrying through a well-planned programme.

The pre-school's pedagogic objectives

The child's development is characterized by two processes, those of maturation and learning.

For the development of social and linguistic capacity, biological maturity plays the role of preparation to receive learning by environmental experience. Only thereafter do these capacities develop in the child. Maturation and learning are in a process of continual interplay.

We lack today any "blanket" theory of development psychology, which comprehensively covers both intellectual and emotional development. The Commission on Child Centres has tried to integrate psychoanalysis, primarily the theories of Erik H. Erikson, and the cognitive theories of Piaget. It is emphasized that three mutually interdependent "fields of competency" are central factors for the child's ability optimally to exploit its innate opportunities, namely ego comprehension, conceptual formation, and communication.

However, no psychological approach to the child's development can exist in a vacuum. The approach must always be related to the community in which the child lives, and its values.

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Against this background, three subsidiary pedagogic objectives have been formulated for the pre-school; these should be seen as guidelines for pedagogic work in direct contacts with the child Other factors in the realization of these objectives are the organizational model applied in such work, the structure of the physical environment, and the resources available.

The pre-school, together with the parents, shall provide conditions in which the child can develop and stabilize a conception of itself as an individual. This is a necessary foundation for the child subsequently to be able to co-operate in various respects with others.

The pre-school shall provide favourable conditions for the child successively to develop its communicative ability in interplay with its environment. The child should become increasingly aware of all its innate means of expression, exploiting them in words, sounds, movement and images.

The pre-school shall provide the conditions necessary for a favourable conceptual apparatus to emerge in the child, so that it prior to the commencement of its schooling understands fundamental concepts, and understands a certain interplay between concepts and simple system relationships. The child is to acquire not primarily knowledge, but a method of learning; it is to acquire a capacity to utilize concepts in the solution of problems, and in creative activity.

The purpose of the pre-school is thus in various ways to complement the family, in offering every child optimal conditions for its social, emotional, physical and intellectual development. Close contact and co-operation with the child's parents are a necessary condition for the pre-school being able to provide a good basis for the child's development.

The pre-school shall not anticipate the school proper by putting an emphasis, for instance, on reading, writing, and arithmetical skill. The child is to proceed at its own pace. This means that the child, in its interplay with other children and adults, shall have the opportunity to develop its innate capacity, with an emphasis alike on co-operative ability, communicative ability, and the learning of concepts. Communicative ability involves not only linguistic development, but also an awareness of one's own innate powers of expression in respect of words, sound (music), movement, colour, form and image. It is important that the pre-school should seize upon the child's ability to experience all these means of communication.

Before attending school proper, it is important that the child should understand fundamental concepts, and how certain things function in interplay with each other.

The need to renew the pre-school's internal and external environment

The placing of the pre-school in the town plan is important. Children need contact with different everyday phenomena, with working life and leisure activities, with people of all ages, and with the countryside. All planning should start from the children's needs and from an awareness that the area in which the children live, and attend pre-school and school, is usually their absolutely dominant experiential value.

There is a need for open-planned premises for the pre-school, which permit a variety of activities to be under way simultaneously without colliding, and an efficient utilization of surface. Space should be planned in such a way that meals, sleep and rest do not encroach upon play. The pre-school's indoor and outdoor environments must complement each other, and it should be easy for the children to transfer between them.

With the climatic conditions prevailing in Sweden, allowance must be made for the fact that both children and staff will necessarily spend most of their time indoors for long periods. Planning that fails to take this into account will have a negative effect, forcing both children and staff to comply with excessively strict common routines.

The pre-school must also offer the children an exciting outdoor environment, rich in fantasy and variation. Planning should start from an attempt to give the children freedom of choice - building games, gardening, games in the sand-pit, movement games of different kinds, opportunities to play together, or alone. The various activities that are planned by adults, and in which adults take part, must be complemented by free games without adult control at places outside the range of adults.

Pedagogic patterns in the pre-school

As a general characterization of the pedagogic pattern implied by the selection of objectives and theories made in respect of the pre-school, the Commission on Child Centres has adopted the term "dialogue pedagogics". The methodology of dialogue pedagogics assumes "that a continuous dialogue should take place between children and adults, on both an inward and outward level, with a mutual giving and taking in respect of feelings, experiences and knowledge. The child - adult dialogue involves respect for the child as an active individual, and is a necessary condition for the child experiencing meaningful human relationships that will lead in the long term to the child itself developing such relationships".

This means that the educationist also sees himself as an individual in an ongoing developmental process; this, in its turn, affects the way in which he functions at work. The mutual interplay between adult and child makes it possible to liberate the child's resources. This interplay can subsequently also function as a model for the child, since it illustrates the terms of co-operation - namely, to give and to take.

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Instead of evaluating what the child does, checking its knowledge etc., the adult should interpret the child's behaviour as expressing its conception of its environment. The child should learn to collect, with a critical attitude, new facts to which it adopts an own position, rather than learning that there is a correct answer to questions, a given solution to problems.

The pre-school's attitude towards the child's way of learning is that the child learns continuously and in all situations, from the feeding situation to games with cyphers and letters. The early years are dominated by routine situations that relate to feeding, dressing and undressing, pot training etc. The child's interest is also focused on these situations, which offer a wealth of opportunities to develop the pre-school's subsidiary pedagogic objectives. It is thus entirely alien to the Swedish pre-school to speak of care as something distinct from pedagogics. The adult, the educationist, has in every situation the function of helping the child by structuring its learning opportunities, and expanding its environmental orientation. The child learns by acquiring concrete experience in different fields. The role of the educationist is to stimulate and expand the child's growing interest, and to initiate that which is judged to be suitable - but which the child itself is incapable of realizing.

The child learns by imitation and identification; the adult, whether he likes it or not, functions as a model, so that it is important to stress the child's indirect learning process. It is essential that adults should function with each other in accordance with the objectives set up for children by the pre-school, solving conflicts, making decisions, and giving and taking responsibility. Co-operation between parents is also of decisive importance, as is co-operation between sibling groups, in which the older children can function as objects for imitation by the younger.

The corner-stones of the pre-school adopting a pattern of dialogue pedagogics are thus interplay and co-operation: children - adults, children - children, and adults - adults.

The responsibility of all adults for following up the decisions

To anyone who has worked with pre-school questions at the committee stage, the Government Bill on pre-schools, and the decisions made by Parliament, are in many respects a source of pleasure and satisfaction. The decisions made follow, by and large, the recommendations of the 1968 Commission on Child Centres in its main report. The realization of these decisions in the individual municipal area is a question that concerns us all; in other words, we as the municipality's inhabitants are obliged to act politically and in a committed manner to ensure that these services for children are expanded and improved.

We all take part in shaping the conditions in which our own and other people's children live. Small children deserve the best, but investments require money. The question, ultimately, is how far each of us is prepared to go in their solidarity with the children, and how much we are prepared as tax-payers to invest in the community's resources for small children. It is also we who elect the politicians who will be responsible for developing and planning the community. We should see to it that the politicians know about the needs of small children, and that they plan and budget with a

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degree of social imagination. The experiments with civic democracy that are to be made, with, for instance, special joint boards for different institutions in some ten municipal areas in Sweden, may prove to have precisely the effect that the parents, permanent staff and politicians will establish a better contact and mutual understanding, working together on the children's needs, and guaranteeing the children's right that those needs should be met. The gist of current discussion among pre-school staff and parents is precisely how to acquire greater influence, and greater opportunities to discuss and to help determine the resources of the individual pre-school to function as an adequate environment for children.

In the debate on the subject of the pre-school, a demand has been made in some quarters that its activities should be regulated by, say, a statute corresponding to that governing the activities of schools. Many believe that this would ensure a high quality of pre-school education. This suggestion, however, was rejected by Parliament.

It is true that a detailed regulation of the size of groups, and of the numbers and compositon of staff, would be a strength when the reform first comes into force. In the long run, however, such a locking of activities could prevent any very dynamic development. In the case of the schools, the restrictive effect of the Schools Act on activities in the 9-year basic comprehensive are now a subject of discussion. A special commission is considering, among other things, how to design less restrictive frameworks for activities in the schools. In the case of the pre-school, it seems likely, rather, that a conscious opinion among parents and staff, and among all those interested in the conditions of children, will influence development in such a way as to ensure the allocation of resources, which will guarantee children an adequacy of adult contacts, and personnel well trained for their duties.

Extended family service - an important aspect of equality

The reform of Swedish pre-schools should be seen in its overall context. It is one of many measures relating to family policy that the Government has introduced in recent years. Social development at large has led both to an increase in financial support to families, and greatly extended family services in the form of provisions for pre-schools, child health services, and other preventive social child care. Sociologist Rita Liljeström, who has outlined the sociological background to the recommendations of the Commission on Child Centres in her book "Uppväxtvillkor" ("Growing up"), has analysed in detail what changes in the community mean for children in today's society. In this context, the pre-school, the schools, child health services, and preventive social child care are all important complements to the family. Together with the parents, they constitute the aggregate resources that must be available to guarantee the child's right to an adequate environment in which to grow up and develop its personality. For parents and children alike, these complementary resources are important instruments in achieving greater equality. They offer the children the opportunity of a more equal, common start from the early years.

At the same time, they offer parents more equal opportunities to fulfil their parental, occupational and civic roles. A rapid expansion of these provisions is thus as important as the various forms of financial support extended to families.

How can the pre-school be organized?

The following organizational models for the pre-school can be applied, from the social and pedagogic objectives set by the Commission on Child Centres:

Full-time pre-school:

Infant groups for children of 6 months - approximately 2 1/2 years of age. Size of group: 8 - 12 children

Mixed-age "sibling groups" for children of approximately 2 1/2 - 7 years of age. Different sibling group models can be formed with 10 - 20 children.

Part-time pre-school:

Children attending the pre-school on a part-time basis (3 - 5 hours) should be integrated as far as possible in the groups of the full-time pre-school. This recommendation, however, can be put into effect only gradually, owing to the great need for full-time pre-school attendance, particularly in new residential areas. Separate part-time groups (3 hours per day) should therefore be arranged for children who, while the full-time pre-school is being expanded, cannot be offered places in a full-time group; such groups will also continue to be arranged in districts where this is required by special circumstances, e.g. sparsely populated areas. Size of part-time groups: 20 children.

The staff team - the pre-school as the first democratic place of work

A necessary condition for the above organizational model with sibling groups is that the staff of the pre-school should function as a working team, in which all plan their work together and assume responsibility for common decisions, and in which all staff members have pedagogic duties. In a society concerned to offer its children a democratic pattern of life, children must be given opportunity from the very beginning to experience human interplay. This is not something that can be taught by talking about it. Co-operation can never be learned other than by the children experiencing in concrete situations how adults plan their work together, and solve their joint problems and conflicts. In this way, the child is in a position to adopt a democratic working method in its relationships with other children and with adults.

The pre-school

How many children can the pre-school system take?

The following table, taken from this year's Budget and Finance Bill, shows the expansion of public services to families with children since 1960. Figures relate to the number of places in day nurseries and part-time groups at mid-year:

Year	No. of places in day nurseries	family day nurseries	No. of children in part time groups
1960	10,300	4,000	38,400
1965	11,900	8.000	52,100
1970	33,000	32,000	86,000
1971	41,000	41,500	91,000
1972	46,400	43,500	96,000
1973[1]	54,600	44,500	101,000
1974[1]	62,800	51,000	108,000

1. Estimated figure

According to the latest available statistics from the Central Bureau of Statistics, 54,257 children were enrolled at day nurseries as of 2 April 1973, while the number of places was 50,709, somewhat less than the estimated figure given in the Finance Bill. 101,049 children were enrolled in part-time groups (play schools). The number of children enrolled at family day nurseries was 50,499.

This means that 25% of all pre-school children in the country were enrolled at a pre-school or family day nursery in 1973. However, the proportion varied greatly from one part of Sweden to another. The total number of children cared for the entire day at a day nursery or family day nursery was 96,461, or 12% of all children born 1966-1972.

A continued expansion of whole-day care for pre-school children at the rate presupposed by the Finance Bill for the years 1972-1974 would mean a total of 112,000 day nursery places by 1980. This would cover 37% of the requirement for expansion of the day nurseries. Probably, the further expansion of day nurseries will cover between 40 and 50 per cent of the requirement by 1980, resulting in 120,000 - 150,000 places. It is also assumed that some 200,000 children will be attending a part-time pre-school in that year. On top of this, there will be a number of places in family day nurseries.

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New commissions on the conditions of children

Since the Commission on Child Centres presented its report on the pre-school, several major commissions have been appointed to review the conditions of pre-school children.

A special working group, the Provisions for Children Group, has been set up to study in detail, in connection with the Board of Health and Welfare's experimental activities in the pre-school sector, the procedures for case-finding activities, and the question of responsibility for pre-school activities on the part of handicapped children. By a decision of Parliament in December 1973, the same group will be considering the possible structure of training for parents. In addition, a special Children's Environment Commission has been appointed to illustrate long-term changes in the conditions under which children live. This Commission is to analyse the current living conditions of children, and the changes that are taking place. The Commission's report is intended to provide a basis for a broad discussion of measures to improve the environment in which children grow up. In this context, the pre-school, the school, the living environment, family finances, child health, and children's culture will all be analysed and described.

A commission has also been created to make a rapid analysis of experiences of the new rules on benefits under the recently introduced "parents' insurance". When considering the length of the period for which one parent is compensated for absence from work in connection with the child's birth, the commission will also study the situation of the very youngest children at day nurseries. This commission may make an important contribution to the future design of the pre-school system so far as the youngest children are concerned.

Since 1972, the National Board of Health and Welfare has organized intensive research in this field. The object of its pedagogic and organizational experiments is - on the basis of the main and subsidiary objectives proposed by the Commission on Child Centres - to test the Commission's proposals in respect of methodology and internal organization, and external relations. Methodology and internal organization cover the working approach to be applied in pre-schools ("dialogue" pedagogics to promote the child's ego development, communicative ability, and formation of a conceptual apparatus), grouping by age (infant and sibling groups), and size of group, the collaboration of the staff in work-teams, the integration of children with special needs (individual and group integration), the suitability of the environmental programme proposed, a testing of the pedagogic programme on existing premises, and the pedagogic and social functions of the small day nursery. External relations cover collaboration with parents and with the residential area at large (childminders, family day nurseries, organized park games, libraries, places of work etc.), and collaboration with the schools, and with the authority responsible for the pre-school. The Board of Health and Welfare is also preparing a special information campaign for pre-school staff and for local politicians and senior permanent officers concerning the import of the pre-school reform. Regional courses are being arranged,

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which will be followed up by local, municipal activities (study groups and conferences); also study material is being compiled, on the basis both of the report by the Commission on Child Centres, and the work the Board of Health and Welfare has already put in on a work schedule for the pre-school.

During the 70's, considerable knowledge will thus be gained as regards the real conditions of pre-school children in Sweden, and improved means of achieving a satisfactory environment for both children and adults. In this context we can also mention the important discussion that has started on the subject of shorter working hours. If a 6-hour working day can be realized, the pre-school could be even a better thing for the children. It is a valuable institution even now, but many children spend too long at the day nursery, owing precisely to their parents' long working day, and their travel to and from work. As yet, however, no commission has been charged to analyse this question, and to present realistic proposals for a shorter working day. The union and political organizations, however, have begun to penetrate the problem, so that we can hope for developments in this field, too.

Child research has now started in earnest

We can note, finally, that - with the report of the Commission on Child Centres - research relating to children of pre-school age has got under way at our university and college departments of education and psychology. In this way, important findings can be submitted to the decision-makers when they reflect on measures for pre-school children, and what a good environment for the growing generation actually involves.

We thus have every reason to view the future with optimism as regards young children, and the opportunity to provide for them and attend to their needs in their immediate environment, through the pre-school, and through the latter's interplay with all the other human and material resources that should be available.

The Commission on Child Centres is now drafting proposals on revised training schemes for all those who work in pre-schools, and analysing the implications of "training on the basis of the children's own needs".

The pre-school reform can thus be seen as a good beginning to something even better to be provided for our young children and their parents sometime in the future.

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